



The Changeworks

Consulting, Training, Books and CDs

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Living in a Metaphorical Universe

Each of us has an internal image of “the world” through which we filter events, what the Germans call a Weltanschauung. Your world-image is difficult to see because it’s deeply unconscious, but it is an actual image that you carry with you and refer to constantly. The intensity and degree to which you believe in your image of the world is what partially motivates and drives you, especially when you are in the trance of your personality defenses. Our world-image reflects the subjective metaphorical universe that we live in.

Other Enneagram styles live in different subjective universes. Ones can inhabit worlds that seem chaotic and therefore need correcting or ordering. Twos often live in universes that are fundamentally interpersonal, where other people are always in need. Threes see life as a competitive event and their unconscious image of the world may be of a sports arena or a racetrack. In the Nine trance, the deepest conviction is, “Nothing really matters and my life is not my own.” A Nine can then see the world as an indifferent meaningless place in which he is ultimately doomed and acting on his own behalf is pointless.

The general rule is that your present world-image is a disguised version of your childhood view of the world. If you were to list your ten deepest beliefs about “the world” and then rewrite the list with the words, “my childhood world was” you might find the results surprisingly similar.

If your family of origin was a friendly place, your present world-image will be fundamentally benign. If your early environment was hostile, your unconscious vision of the world will tend to be darker and more menacing.

Metaphorical Self-Images

Beyond our biological need for identity is the need to know who we are in a deep, personal sense. Each of us maintains a self-image that is based on who we once were within our family of origin, culture and subculture.

Our self-image partially reflects how others first saw us. Therapist Salvador Minuchin has observed that “families create specialists.” That is, children often feel typecast within their family script. Early in life, we were recognized for particular qualities (“she’s sensitive, just like her grandmother”) and not others which we might have also had. When we were young, our family might have needed us to be someone – a hero, a caretaker, a scapegoat – and we took on that role in order to adapt.

We internalized a narrow view of ourselves and began to believe it, forgetting that this view was a tactic, a defensive mask we adopted to get through childhood. Decades later we may find that the mask has stuck to our face, mistaken – even by us – for our complete identity.

Our self-image is deeply unconscious and attached to memories, roles, habitual emotions. It even has a body location. In the trance of our Enneagram style we are attached to our image and unconsciously believe we can’t exist without it. Some overdefended behavior is an attempt to maintain this historical image of ourselves, despite the fact that the world around us has changed.

Different Enneagram styles are prone to different self-images. Ones may see themselves as prophets, reformers or arbiters of the rules, Twos as angels or helpers, Threes as high-performance success machines, Fours as unique and sensitive aliens, orphans or invalids. Fives sometimes see themselves as computers or librarians, Sixes as victims or slaves and Sevens as jesters or adventurers. Eights can see themselves as warriors or animals, especially guard dogs, sharks, and lions. Nines report images of peasants, refugees, bag ladies, servants or second-class citizens.

Each Enneagram trance is anchored by metaphorical self-images that drive the style’s preoccupation. The kind of self-image you have partially dictates the story you are prone to living, with all its strengths and drawbacks. An unhealthy Eight’s aggression makes more sense when you know that she subjectively lives in a jungle and has an unconscious self-image of a wild animal.

As you work on personality defenses, another kind of image that can arise is that of a child, a younger part of you who is stuck in time, fighting an old battle or coping with a difficult past circumstance. When you are overdefended, you are usually protecting something vulnerable within yourself. The unconscious often represents that vulnerability as a young self.

Different Enneagram styles have different child-images. Ones probing their defenses can discover images of children who are burdened, criticized or sad. Twos find children who are unwanted or unloved. Threes see children who are insecure or craving attention, while entranced Fours may find children who feel rejected or privileged.

With Fives, the child-images tend to be anxious, confused or ashamed. Six child-images can be pampered, helpless or terrorized. Sevens find children who are abandoned, obligated or guilty, while Eight child-images are often defenseless, betrayed or innocent. Nines may see images of children who are forlorn, invisible and shy.

Therapeutic Metaphor and the Enneagram

The notion of therapeutic metaphor arose originally when communication researchers observed that effective psychotherapists tend to tell lots of stories. Therapists use metaphor in a concentrated, pointed way to drive home important ideas or evoke resources in their clients. The researchers also noted that the tendency to use metaphor was generally characteristic of good communicators. Rabbis, politicians, teachers, parents all routinely stud what they say with stories.

If you use the Enneagram in a focused way, either personally or professionally, it's often useful to illustrate what you communicate with an anecdote, joke or metaphor. If a picture's worth a thousand words then a story's worth a thousand explanations.

Generally there are good sources of metaphor right under our chins. Our past experience includes many times when we learned something new or broke through limits, some of them Enneagram-related. Things that happened to you can be converted into stories, even third-person stories that you tell as though they happened to a friend. Not all but some of your personal stories will have an Enneagram resonance.

If you listen more closely to friends and colleagues, you may also begin to hear stories, some of which relate to their Enneagram styles. If you have a profession where you work with people then all of your past clients are potential examples that you can offer to your present clients. A story could begin with the words, “I knew someone once with a similar problem ...” The story then is about what someone else did in a similar situation to your client's.

Other obvious sources of Enneagram-related stories are literature, movies, newspapers, etc. There may be many stories you have heard that have Enneagram-related meanings that the author did not intend. You may like a particular metaphor and initially not realize its application to the Enneagram. When you think about it more deeply, the stories' meaning may come clear.

You can use therapeutic metaphors to:

- * improve communication
- * solve problems
- * make good decisions
- * change a painful behavior
- * achieve a goal
- * reframe a limit or difficulty
- * find a new direction
- * go beyond boundaries and tell the truth
- * develop a meta-perspective, an observing ego
- * progress from the low side of an Enneagram style to the high side

Types of metaphors:

- * pacing and leading stories
- * chains of short stories and anecdotes
- * long stories
- * stories that arise from the client's life or problem
- * utilizing spontaneous imagery
- * external metaphor and homework assignments
- * objects and symbols
- * using humor and jokes

Creating therapeutic metaphors from:

- * your own experience
- * from people you know
- * your clients
- * movies, literature, stories from spiritual traditions

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